

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O P 281133Z AUG 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4597
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5496

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, PLO, US, XF
SUBJ: PCC REJECTION OF 242

1. SUMMARY:

THE PCC REJECTION OF THE U.S. OFFER TO TALKS WITH THE
PLO WAS CAUSED BY A COMBINATION OF (A) SYRO-PLAESTINIAN
SUSPICIOUS OF U.S. MOTIVES, (B) INTER-ARAB RIVALRY, (C)
PLO CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE SOVIET REACTION, AND (D) INTERNAL
PLO RIVALRIES WHICH THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP DID NOT
WISH TO EXACERBATE AT THIS TIME. SHORT TERM TACTICAL CON-
SIDERATIONS REGRETTABLE APPEAR TO DOMINATE BOTH SYRIAN AND PLO
THINKING ABOUT THE U.S. INITIATIVE. END SUMMARY

2. I WAS APPARENT SOME DAYS BEFORECONVENING OF AUGUST 25/26
MEETING OF THE PALESTINE CENTRAL COUNCIL THAT PCC WAS NOT
GOING TO MAKE ANY MOVE TOWARD ACCEPTING RESOLUTION 242.
THUS THE UNCOMPROMISING COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AFTER THE
COUNCIL'S MEETINGS SURPRISED NO ONE. NEVERTHELESS, WE
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ARE TOLD BY SYRIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND BY THOSE
WHO TALKED TO PLO OFFICIALS AFTER THE PCC MEETINGS, THAT
THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN TO A U.S. - PLO DIALOGUE.

3. IN ITS HANDLING OF THE PLO ISSUE, THE USG CONFRONTS TWO
OF THE MOST SUSPICIOUS PEOPLES IN THE MIDDLE EAST--
THE SYRIANS AND THE PALESTINIANS. THE SYRIANS ADMIT

PRESIDENT CARTER'S OFFER OF A DIALOGUE WITH THE PLO IS ATTRACTIVE, REALIZE IT HAS ALARMED ISRAEL AND ARE AWARE IT WOULD POSSIBLE DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE UJMS. AND ISRAEL. HOWEVER, THEN LOOK FOR DARKER U.S. MOTIVES AND ARE NOT PREPARED TO TAKE OUR OFFER AT FACE VALUE. AS THEY ASSERT, OUR OFFER COULD BE AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE SYRIAN INFLUENCE WITH THE PLO, OR, EVEN MORE DANGEROUS, TO REPLACE SYRIAN INFLUENCE OVER THE PLO BY SAUDI AND EGYPTIAN HEGEMONY. TO SYRIANS, THIS SEEMED A REAL POSSIBILITY AS THE SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS TOOK THE LEAD IN ENCOURAGING THE PLO TO ACCEPT OUR OFFER. WE GATHER THAT AFTER THE SECRETARY'S SECOND VISIT HERE IN AUGUST, PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD CALLED IN ARAFAT ON AUGUST 12 TO EXPRESS DISPLEASURE THAT HE SEEMED TO BE RESPONDING TO SAUDI ENDORSEMENTS OF BEHALF OF THE U.S. OFFER. THIS SIGNALS TO US THAT INTER-ARAB RIVALRY PLAYED A ROLE IN UNITING THE PCC BEHIND REJECTION OF OUR FORMULA.

4. WITH SYRIA URGING NO TO THE U.S. PROPOSAL FOR A DIALOGUE, AND THE SAUDIS URGING YES, THE PLO WAS CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE. IT CANNOT AND DOES NOT WANT TO DO WITHOUT SAUDI MATERIAL SUPPORT, BUT IT APPARENTLY MISTRUSTS THE INTENTIONS OF THE U.S., SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS NO LESS THAN THE SYRIANS DO. THE PLO READ RECENT EGYPTIAN TALK OF PALESTINIAN LINKAGE WITH JORDAN AS A SIGN THAT WE ARE JOINTLY TRYING TO FREEZE THE PLO OUT OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS
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ONCE AGAIN. SADAT'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS WORKING GROUP CONCEPT, WITH ON PRIOR PREPARATION OF HIS FELLOW ARABS' SERVED ONLY TO DEEPEN THIS SUSPICION. SYRIA, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS CONCICTANTLY SUPPORTED PLO INVOLVEMENT IN NEGOTIATIONS FROM THE BEGINNING AND WHILE THE PLO DOES NOT FULLY TRUST THE SYRIANS EITHER, IT DOES VALUE SYRIA'S CONSISTENT STAND ABOUT GENEVA AND SEEMS IT MUST PRESERVE SYRIA'S FIRM SUPPORT. THE ONLY SENSIBLE ANSWER TO THE PLO'S INTER-ARAB DILEMMA WAS TO DO NOTHING LAST WEEK AT THE PCC, WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT THEY DID IN HARKING BACK TO THE PNC'S 15 POINTS OF LAST MARCH. THE PLO'S SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE SIGNALS THAT THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN FOR U.S.-PLO TALKS, REACHING US THROUGH VARIOUS CHANNELS, SEEMS ON FIRST EXAMINATION TO OFFER US LITTLE TANGIBLE WITH WHICH TO WORK.

5. WHILE THE PLO IS A PRISONER OF INTER-ARAB RIVALRIES AND PROBABLY SUBJECT TO A SYRIAN VETO OVER ITS MOVES, IT, LIKE SYRIA MUST ALSO KEEP A CAUTIOUS EYE ON SOVIET REACTIONS TO AVOID ALIENATING MOSCOW'S SUPPORT. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN ADVISING ON THE U.S. OFFER OF A DIALOGUE. THEY HAVE MAINTAINED THAT THE PLO SHOULD ACCEPT RESOLUTION 242, BUT MOSCOW MAY SEE THE IDEA OF A U.S.-PLO

DIALOGUE AS ANOTHER U.S. ATTEMPT TO PLAY A LONE HAND AIMED AT EXCLUDING THE USSR FROM ANY ACTIVE ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. ARAFAT WILL TOUCH BASE WITH THE SOVIETS ONEC AGAIN THIS WEEK IN MOSCOW. OUR GUESS IS THAT HE HAS NOT AND WILL NOT GET MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THAT QUARTER TO ACCEPT THE U.S. OFFER IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5496

EXDIS

6. SINCE EXTERNAL FACTORS COMBINED WITH SUSPICION OF U.S. MOTIVES MILITATED AGAINST THE PLO'S ACCEPTANCE OF RESOLUTION 242 IN ANY GUISE, THOSE PLO LEADERS WHO MAY HAVE FAVORED OUR FORMULA HAD WEAK GROUNDS ON WHICH TO BUILD A SUFFICIENTLY BROAD PLO CONSENSUS TO NEUTRALIZE THE REJECTIONISTS, THE PROPOSAL'S NATURAL ENEMIES. EVEN PALESTINIANS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES MODERATE ARE INTENSELY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE IDEA OF PALESTINIAN RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL WHICH IS IMPLIED IN ACCEPTANCE OF RESOLUTION 24-. FURTHERMORE, RECENT ISRAELI STATEMENTS REJECTING THE PLO IN ANY SHAPE OR FORM HAVE CONVINCED THE PALESTINIANS THAT THEIR PROSPECTS OF ATTAINING EVEN MINIMAL OBJECTIVES IN THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ARE DIM INDEED. UNDER THE BEST OF CONDITIONS, THE GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHICH HUDDLE UNDER THE PLO UMBRELLA WOULD DISAGREE ON THE U.S. PROPOSAL. UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS THE RISK OF BITTER FEUDING WOULD BE HIGH, PARTICULARLY WHEN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHATAURA AGREEMENT ATTEMPTING TO BANK THE FIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON IS ENTERING A CRITICAL

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7. WE VIEW THE PLO, AND FOR THAT MATTER SYRIA, AS
REGRETTABLY DOMINATED BY TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND
FAILING TO SEE OR BELIEVE IN THE LONG-TERM GAINS AVAILABLE
THROUGH WHAT COULD LEAD O VIRTUAL U.S. RECOGNITION OF
PLO. IN ANY CASE, THE PLO SEEMS TO BELIEVE THE U.S. OFFER
REMAINS OPEN AND NEED NOT BE ACCEPTED RIGHT NOW. THE PLO
UNDOUBTEDLY SEE IT ADVANTAGEOUS IN COPING WITH ITS TACTICAL
EXIGENCIES TO PUT THE U.S. OFF FOR A WHILE, ASSUMING A
POSITIVE RESPONSE CAN BE MADE WHEN IT IS ECOVENIENT.
IT WILL NOT BE CONVENIENT UNTIL ADJUDGED IT WILL NOT
ALIENATE ONE OR MORE OF THE PLO'S MENTORS AND IT
CONTAINS NO MAJOR RISK OF DESTROYING THE DELICATE POLITICAL
BALANCE WITH IN THE PLO.

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